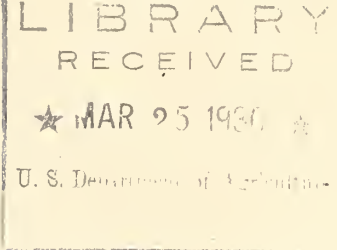


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IMPORTED FOODS AND DRUGS

A radio talk by Dr. A. E. Taylor, Food, Drug and Insecticide Administration, delivered through Station WRC and 32 other stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, Thursday, March 13, 1930.

Did you ever go through the sampling rooms of the United States Government Appraiser's Stores offices at one of our great seaports? If you ever did take such a trip, and if you are a person with a lively imagination, you must have been fascinated by the display of food stuffs and drugs which had come from the ends of the earth to supply American consumers with meat and drink and medicines.

And while you were speculating on the romances back of a bale of cinchona bark from the forests of Peruvian mountains or from the plantations of Java, a package of tea from the Island of Formosa, or what not, a sober second thought may have occurred to you; a thought something like this: "How do I, or how does any consumer know that all these foods and these drugs coming from other countries are pure and wholesome and honestly labeled?"

I am going to try today in this brief talk to tell you the answer to that question. For more than 25 years the Food and Drug officials of the United States Department of Agriculture have been inspecting these products from foreign lands to insure their purity.

The process of inspection starts at the Food and Drugs station or laboratories located at 17 different ports of entry in the United States. It is obvious that we do not take a sample and make chemical examinations of each and every shipment coming into the United States. This would be extremely expensive, very time consuming and wasteful. I may say that 90% or more of the foods and drugs imported are not adulterated or misbranded. The law intends that we sample goods suspected of adulteration or misbranding.

From our experience with the various products, with the practices of certain shippers and certain consignees, it is possible to make a selection of products for complete examination. The results obtained by the sampling under the supervision of men who thoroughly know import commodities results in the entry of very few goods which are either adulterated or misbranded in any important particular.

The examinations made are of various kinds, visual examinations, examinations by chemical means, which are the commonest; also tests are made which are largely physical or which involve use of the microscope, as well as bacteriological examination; for example, on waters, to determine that they are of proper sanitary quality. Similarly, canned goods are examined to determine that they are sterile and free from bacteria which might cause spoilage or bacteria which may be even dangerous to health.

The Food and Drugs Act provides that drugs official in the Pharmacopoeia of the United States or in the National Formulary are adulterated if they do not meet the requirements laid down therein. Our control of drugs is extremely important because of the fact that almost without exception the important crude drugs which contain active principles used in the control of disease are imported. They include such drugs as ergot, the extract of which is commonly used to control possible hemorrhage in childbirth; such important heart stimulants as digitalis, obtained from the leaves of digitalis or foxglove; cinchona bark, which contains quinine and other important cinchona alkaloids, absolutely essential in the treatment of malaria. The Pharmacopoeia in general requires that crude drugs shall be clean, that is, free from dirt and dust; that they shall be true to name; that they shall be entirely free from harmful foreign material; and that they shall be as free as possible from harmless organic material, such as stems in the case of a product which should consist only of the leaves; and that they shall be free from deterioration due to mold or insect damage. In other words, it requires careful handling to insure a clean and sound product. Great care is exercised to see that these various drugs, upon which the physician ultimately relies, are pure and free from adulteration and of a standard quality before they are released.

Labels of medicinal preparations which make curative or therapeutic statements are carefully scanned to determine that they do not make promises of benefit in diseases for which they have little or no usefulness. Relabeling is required of many such preparations to insure that the labeling and literature is suitable. The law provides protection from many drug fads and fancies which would be imported in large quantities from Europe but for our activity. In the import samples we find many herb remedies, consisting of simple and non-potent herbs, recommended as treatments for tuberculosis or cancer or other serious diseases. Such products are absolutely refused entry when so represented. Strange as it may seem, there are many who would rely on such remedies for treatment of serious diseases; believe the glowing statements in their literature; and in many instances would die as a result of failure to obtain proper medical treatment and attention. So-called "Oxygen Therapy," a fad in certain European countries, has been represented by cures for diabetes which depend upon a tiny bit of oxygen given off by the preparation but which would not in fact get beyond the stomach.

While many of the foods imported are also manufactured in this country, almost every country has some particular type which makes its particular appeal, and is therefore brought to this country. Further, for many of our important foods or condiments, we depend solely on foreign countries because they can not be grown here; for example, cocoa beans, in amount one of the largest food product items imported. During the last ten or fifteen years, the importations of this product from African colonies had greatly increased. The method of preparation was not as careful as in some of the older places of production. In consequence, many of the beans, due to careless handling, were moldy, a condition which hurts the flavor of the finished chocolate or cocoa, and constitutes adulteration. Our inspection and detentions have resulted in corrective action so that at the present time there is comparatively rare occasion to refuse entry

to African cocoa beans, and in fact more beans are imported from Africa than from any other source.

This is illustrative of the action taken on many natural food products to insure that they are carefully handled, and that they are as free as practicable from the attacks of molds or insects, to which nearly every natural product is subject, including figs from Turkey and other Mediterranean countries and dates from Northern Africa and the Persian Gulf.

You know the extent to which nuts are subject to insect and mold damage, and probably know that fifteen or more years ago nuts when cracked showed many wormy, moldy, or shriveled nuts. Nuts are imported in great quantities and as a result of our inspections and detentions, at the present time the percentage of nuts which will crack bad is very low.

Olive oil is imported in great amounts and many rumors have been circulated to the effect that it is largely adulterated with other oils. Such statements have very little basis in fact, nevertheless, it has not been uncommon to find a tin of olive oil labeled as "1 Quart" when in fact it contained less. Such goods, however, are not released until they are properly labeled. Such corrective action has been taken against all types of food in package form, for the law requires that they shall be plainly and conspicuously labeled with a true statement of the net weight or net volume.

Our spices all come from abroad, from Africa, from India, the East Indies, and other sources. At present, the quality of the spices imported is very high due to our inspection and corrective measures.

Dried eggs are imported in great volume from China and our inspections insure as far as possible that they are prepared under sanitary conditions and are not of doubtful quality.

Cod liver oil is in the main imported, chiefly from Norway and Canada. The requirements of the Pharmacopoeia that the product shall be of a particular grade of purity and quality are rigidly insured by careful inspection and examination.

This will give you a birdseye view and a few examples of the activities of the Food and Drug Administration in insuring to the public that the foods and drugs imported are carefully handled and collected, free from adulteration with either harmful ingredients or cheaper substitute products, or from a type of labeling which will be misleading in any particular.

